

FirstNet outlines four phases of RFP evaluation process during webinar

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Bidders responding to the [FirstNet](#) request for proposal (RFP) that was released that week will need to complete a four-phase process to be selected to build and operate the proposed nationwide public-safety broadband network, officials representing FirstNet said during a recent webinar on the topic.

Offerors' bids will be evaluated during a four-phase process that will differ from traditional federal-government procurements that merely focus on the cost associated with a proposal that meets minimum requirements, according to Terrie Callahan, the contracting officer supporting FirstNet.

"This acquisition is being conducted as a best-value acquisition, utilizing a non-traditional approach to the tradeoff analysis with a value-proposition assessment," Callahan said during the webinar.

This evaluation will be conducted in four phases, Callahan said. Prior to the initial phase of the evaluation process, offerors—expected to be teams of companies—will have the opportunity to ask questions to clarify points in the RFP's more than 500 pages that may be confusing. The deadline for submitting questions is Feb. 12, but FirstNet wants questions to be submitted as they arise, according to Peggy O'Connor, program manager at FirstNet.

"We do not want you to wait until the due date and time to submit your questions," O'Connor said during the webinar. "Please submit your questions as you have them. This allows us to expedite turnaround time for the issuance of responses."

On March 17, offerors are scheduled to submit their capability statements, in which each bidder should demonstrate that it is "qualified to perform the work" of building and operation the nationwide first-responder network. This marks the beginning of first phase of the evaluation process, with the FirstNet evaluation team assessing the capability statement and providing feedback, Callahan said.

“This phase allows offerors to demonstrate that they are capable of performing the work,” Callahan said. “It allows the government to advise the offerors of their potential to be a viable competitor or considered not to be a viable competitor.”

“Notwithstanding the advice provided by the government that they are not considered to be a viable competitor, they may still participate in the resultant acquisition, follow the instructions in Section L and submit a proposal.”

Offerors must submit their final responses to the FirstNet RFP by April 29, after which the FirstNet evaluation team will conduct the final three phases of the selection process.

In the solicitation-conformance phase, the evaluation team “will conduct an initial review of proposals in order to verify performance and completeness with the RFP instructions,” Callahan said. That will be followed by a pass/fail phase in which evaluators will determine whether offerors meet the minimum requirements outlined in the RFP.

This will lead to the final phase of evaluation, in which the evaluation team will compare the proposals of offerors that survive the first three evaluation phases.

“Phase 4 is a detailed evaluation phase,” Callahan said. “During this phase, the government will commence the detailed evaluations for those offerors whose proposed solutions have been determined to conform with the RFP in Phase 2 and successfully passed Phase 3.

“Within Phase 4, the evaluation factors that are included—they are also stated in section M [of the RFP]—are business management, coverage and capacity, product and architecture, value-proposition assessment and past performance.”

[FirstNet](#)’s RFP estimates that the winning offeror will be selected and the contract awarded by Nov. 1, but FirstNet CEO Mike Poth has said that the timetable could be adjusted, based on the number of bids that need to be evaluated.

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